

Ontario winemakers call government plan "next steps in evolution" of industry

NIAGARA, ON, Oct. 13 /CNW/ - A new, multi-year transitional plan for Ontario's wine industry has been met with cautious optimism by the Wine Council of Ontario, which represents the province's winemakers.

"We think the plan lays out the next steps in the evolution of Ontario's wine industry," said Wine Council of Ontario Chair Ed Madronich.

"We agree that VQA wines are the future of our industry, and we are encouraged that the government has adopted our recommendations with respect to a VQA support program and greater presence for VQA wines in LCBO stores."

However, Madronich expressed disappointment with plans to finance the VQA enhancements by increasing levies on blended wines, which account for the majority of Ontario wine sales. "While we welcome the investment in the VQA sector, we're extremely disappointed that another key sector will be penalized at the same time," Madronich said.

"When the Ontario government invested in General Motors, they didn't do it by taxing Toyota."

Madronich expressed empathy for those grape growers who are unable to find buyers for their crop, noting that the vast majority of this year's grape production (some 50,000 tonnes) has been purchased by Ontario winemakers.



"All of us in the wine industry understand the hard work and dedication that goes into producing a harvest - all winemakers are grape growers themselves. We're never happy to see an unused surplus, but at the same time, I think we all have to recognize the importance of bringing supply in line with demand so that all partners can move forward toward a stronger, better, more sustainable Ontario wine industry," Madronich said.

"To that end, we're supportive of the government's move to ask the Farm Products Marketing Commission to look at the bigger issue of grape pricing and marketing. But that process must lead to real change if we're going to achieve progress on the supply-demand situation."

The Wine Council of Ontario is a non-profit trade association that represents Ontario's four wine regions - Niagara Peninsula, Pelee Island, Lake Erie North Shore and Prince Edward County. These regions grow 75 per cent of the grapes used in Canadian wine production.

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